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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000585

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS/IP/NEA, DS/PII, DS/ITA, DS/ATA, NEA/ARPI, S/CT

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [BA](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES SECURITY THREATS WITH  
INTERIOR MINISTER

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM T. MONROE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

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SUMMARY

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1. (S) Ambassador met with Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Al-Khalifa April 19 to register our concern about recent threat information and possible surveillance activity, and to thank the Minister for steps taken by his Ministry to enhance Embassy security. The Ambassador also reiterated our concern about four terror suspects currently under surveillance. The Minister discussed the ban of last month's Shia demonstration in Sitra, noting that the government is not against demonstrations in principle (105 have been approved since last August) but had concerns about this one. The Minister stated that progress is being made in setting up the Joint Counterterrorism Center.

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RECENT THREAT INFORMATION IN BAHRAIN

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2. (S) The Ambassador told the Minister that he had requested the meeting to personally advise him of a recent pattern of threat information that had raised concerns at the Embassy and in Washington. The Ambassador began by thanking the Minister for the superb support the Embassy had received from the Ministry, including in response to our recent threat concerns. In the context of threat information in the region -- ranging from last month's attack in Doha to new threat information in Jeddah -- new threat information in Manama has heightened our concern in Bahrain, the Ambassador stated. He then reviewed this information, including website instructions on how to prepare an attack against the Embassy, recent intelligence suggesting terrorists are looking at an attack here, and five reports of possible surveillance incidents involving Embassy employees, including the American Ambassador. The Ambassador then outlined the steps the Embassy has taken, such as enhanced surveillance detection activities and more widely varying times and routes. A third key element, the Ambassador continued, was the visibly increased police presence provided by the Ministry of Interior. Reiterating his appreciation for this increased presence, the Ambassador urged that it be continued as a deterrent to any surveillance or threat against the Embassy or its people.

3. (S) Shaikh Rashid, after confirming with his aides on the type of increased presence provided by the Ministry, vowed to continue security support for the Embassy, respond promptly to our requests, and continue to analyze terrorist threat information in Bahrain and the region.

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STILL CONCERNED ABOUT TERROR SUSPECTS

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4. (S) Ambassador told the Minister that we also remain concerned about the four terror suspects, including Yasser Kamal, who are free under surveillance while their court case proceeds. While we greatly appreciate the cooperation we are receiving on surveillance of these suspects, there are invariably gaps in our knowledge of their activities and intentions. It is our firm belief that they have not moderated their dangerous anti-American sentiments. It is critical that we do all we can to keep the suspects under tight surveillance. Shaikh Rashid agreed that the surveillance of Kamal and others should be close and said that he would follow up with BNSA about coverage.

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NEW ANTI-TERRORISM LAW

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5. (C) Shaykh Rashid said that Bahrain needs to move to pass the new anti-terrorism law. He said he would meet personally with parliamentarians to encourage support for the legislation, but it will take time for the law to be approved -- perhaps one year. Ambassador noted that King Hamad's recent highly-publicized comments supporting the anti-terrorism law were well timed and positive.

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SECURING THE CAUSEWAY  
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16. (S) Shaikh Rashid and Undersecretary Shaikh Daij Al-Khalifa stated that two large cargo X-Ray scanners have been delivered and are being tested before installation at the causeway. Last weekend, the Minister said, a record 14,000 cars entered Bahrain from Saudi Arabia and 2.5 million cars crossed the border in 2004. Asked about the high number of cars coming to Bahrain last weekend, Shaikh Rashid said that the increase is seasonal. Once the weather warms and the desert loses its attraction as a weekend destination, Saudis come in greater numbers to Bahrain to enjoy the more open life here. The vast majority come for entertainment reasons, he added, and we should not be surprised to see greater numbers here now. That said, security at the causeway remains a major concern to the Minister. In addition to the scanners, he is making personnel changes at the causeway. NOTE: The first group of seven Explosive Detector Dogs and handlers provided by DS/ATA will begin work at the causeway next week. END NOTE.

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CONTROLLING SHIA EMOTIONS  
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17. (C) Shaikh Rashid discussed last month's Shia demonstration in Sitra which was held despite a decision to ban it. He noted that despite the ban, it was allowed to proceed, with the police presence there only to intervene in case of violence or trouble. He said both the Ministry and the Shia marchers handled the situation well, as the march proceeded peacefully. The Ambassador commented that the U.S. welcomes and praises the democratic steps taken by the King and the government of Bahrain, but worries about backsliding when demonstrations are banned. Shaykh Rashid said that Bahrain is not against demonstrations. It has approved 105 demonstrations since last August. The concern in this case was that there were anticipated requests for further demonstrations; the Sitra demonstration threatened to develop into a series of continuing sectarian demonstrations, which was not good for Bahrain. And police resources were wearing thin maintaining order during the numerous demonstrations. "But because of democracy," he added, "we have to allow demonstrations. We are trying to keep a healthy balance."

18. (C) Shaykh Rashid described continuing efforts to bring Shia into the ranks of the police. He said he had invited members of Parliament, educators, Shia leaders and families to observe a parade and review of the community policing efforts at the Royal Police Academy last week. NOTE: Shia comprise a very small percentage of police officers in the MOI. END NOTE. The community police training program is designed to create a force of educated Sunni and Shia men and women to become part of the government system to protect people and property. Shia leaders, he said, were impressed and surprised with the efforts being made to integrate the police. He acknowledged, at the same time, that certain positions had to remain manned by foreigners. Bahrain is small, he said, and needs a foreign contingent to deal with sectarian enforcement.

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JOINT COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER  
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19. (C) Ambassador inquired about the progress of the CT Center and how it has progressed since the FBI National Joint Terrorism Task Force Team visited in March. Shaikh Rashid stated how beneficial the visit was to the development of the CT Center. He said office space at MOI has been identified, key MOI personnel have been named, and job descriptions and Standard Operating Procedures are being written. Negotiations on the operation of the Joint Counterterrorism Center continue with the Bahrain National Security Agency, Bahrain Defense Forces and National Guard, he said.

MONROE